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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000875

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MK

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: IMPLEMENTATION OF MAY 29 AGREEMENT
GRINDING TO A HALT?

REF: A. SKOPJE 758 AND PREVIOUS

1B. SKOPJE 815

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Over the last four months, governing VMRO and opposition DUI have been willing, but unyielding, participants in the implementation of the US-EU-brokered five-point May 29 agreement (ref A). There is still hope for the successful near-term re-composition of the committee on inter-ethnic relations and the codification of the list of 46 laws that would require qualified (Badinter) majority. However, the other two main points of the agreement --the draft language law and the social benefits package for victims of the 2001 conflict-- are stuck in the quagmire of political gamesmanship. We will continue to monitor the work of the language law working group and push both sides to concentrate on producing a less than perfect language law draft for Parliament to work from, rather than trying to convince each other that their interpretation of the Constitution and the Framework Agreement is "the correct" one. End summary.

MAY 29 AGREEMENT - SOME HOPE FOR TWO ITEMS...

12. (SBU) Following four months of discussions with no breakthroughs, the first two items of the US-EU-brokered five-point May 29 agreement between governing VMRO and ethnic Albanian opposition DUI (ref A) --codifying a list of 46 laws that would require qualified (Badinter) majority, and recomposing the committee on inter-ethnic relations-- are still blocked by the thousands of amendments proposed by opposition SDSM. The GOM has suggested that, in order to overcome the opposition's resistance, it might include the list of 46 laws as an addendum to the new draft law on the committee on inter-ethnic relations. If this is done and if the law passes, the GOM has a chance to close two items from the May 29 agreement in the near future.

DEAD END FOR THE TWO WORKING GROUPS...?

13. (SBU) Parallel to those discussions, two separate VMRO-DUI working groups --on the draft law on languages and on a package of social benefits for victims of the 2001 conflict-- have met half a dozen times as part of the May 29 agreement implementation. Emboffs have observed the language law working group proceedings, while our EUSR colleagues have followed working group discussions on the victims of conflict

issue. Despite the willingness of both sides to meet with each other, even as tensions related to a Parliamentary brawl reached their peak (ref B), there has been no forward movement on either the language law or the victims of conflict issue.

VICTIMS OF CONFLICT WORKING GROUP - ASKING FOR MORE, GETTING NOTHING...

¶4. (SBU) The victims of the 2001 conflict working group was recently on the verge of achieving success when the GOM presented a package of social benefits, including employment opportunities, for the victims of conflict. Initially receptive to the idea, in the wake of the parliamentary incidents DUI quickly reversed its position and said that it could only accept a draft law on the issue or an addendum to the current law on the 2001 "defenders" (Macedonian military veterans of the 2001 conflict.) This move, which is contrary to the May 29 agreement, and unacceptable to VMRO, derailed the negotiations. The working group last met on October 25, without completing its mandate. EUSR is not planning to observe any future meetings of the working group, and no further meetings of that group have been scheduled.

LANGUAGE LAW WORKING GROUP - WHO WILL BLINK FIRST...?

¶5. (SBU) Headed by a Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, the VMRO team working on the language law showed from the beginning that the GOM was willing to meet with DUI, yet would take a strict constructivist legalistic approach and steadfastly refuse to make any forward-leaning or constructive suggestions for moving the process forward. Even though both sides proposed draft laws, the GOM side summarily labeled the DUI draft "unconstitutional" and going beyond Framework Agreement requirements. Having met in seven

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marathon-length night sessions, the two sides are still debating the essence of their philosophical positions, which are fundamentally irreconcilable.

¶6. (SBU) In conversations with Emboffs, the PM's Chief of Staff has indicated that the GOM understands that its "war of attrition" strategy eventually might lead DUI to walk out of the process. DUI's VP Xhaferi has also indicated that DUI is willing to wait for the GOM to blink first and "show its real intentions to the public." As a result, DUI has given an informal deadline of December 20 for the working group to submit an interim progress report. VMRO's side has dismissed the notion of setting deadlines for debates that are related to decisions of such historical moment. Emboffs will continue to monitor the proceedings of the working group. The next session is scheduled for November 8.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) The GOM understands that implementation of the May 29 agreement is one of the main criteria the international community uses to monitor and evaluate its domestic political progress. That is why the PM has delegated the work to some of his most trusted deputies. However, our conversations with the GOM point to a strategy of "talk, wait and see," rather than to any real desire for political dialogue that leads to compromise and results. On the other hand, DUI's intransigence at key points during the negotiations has raised questions regarding DUI's desire to see the May 29 agreement completed. We will redouble our efforts to convince both sides of the need to reach compromises, and not allow the process to be derailed beyond salvaging.

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